

IT IS now ten months since Wishbone Ash packed up their troubles and settled in the USA, choosing a spot in Westport, Connecticut, that is extraordinarily rural yet within an hour and a half's drive from New York City. Trees and streams surround the location, a pretty piece of New England reminiscent of the Lake District.

Steve Upton and Laurie Wisefield share a home while bassist Martin Turner and guitarist Andy Powell live with their girlfriends. Turner's place—the largest of the three—doubles as a rehearsal room.

Andy Powell was away on a skiing holiday, but the other three members of the band showed up at road manager Russell Sidelski's house to meet the MM, despite a light covering of snow outside.

Why did they leave England?

"We spent so much time touring here when we were living in England that it seemed the logical conclusion to base ourselves here," said Upton. "And, of course, there was this tax business."

"If things were a bit different in England, then we might have thought otherwise, but it's not the most inspiring place to live right now."

"Musically, there's far more going on over here. There's so much of every kind of music you want to get into, and it's available."

"But we're not all settled down here even now, because in some ways it's like being in exile, and however nice you make it here, it's never quite the same as it would have been if we could have stayed."

"Give England back to the English," interjected Turner, sipping tea on a couch and slumping back into silence.

In keeping with this wind of change blowing through the band, Wishbone Ash signed with Atlantic Records in the US about four months ago. Their first Atlantic album "Locked In", produced by Tom Dowd, is released this month.

It was recorded in America in October and November and, according to Turner, Dowd's presence brought a cohesion that had been lacking in previous Wishbone albums.

"Everyone locked in very well with him," he said. "The last two albums we've done we produced ourselves, which wasn't the best of arrangements because we didn't have a lot of experience in that field."

"The voices are featured much more on this new album than they have in the past. When you do your own production you tend to think that it's best to shove the vocals to the back of the track."

"Vocals have always been a bit token with Wishbone Ash and yet we can do them well if we want to. I even remember one reviewer sticking his neck out and comparing our singing to Crosby, Stills and Nash."

"Dowd believes that if you are going to have vocals, then you should hear them," said Wisefield. "There's more emphasis on the songs on this album."

The Reading Festival was Wishbone's only British ap-



WISHBONE ASH'S LAURIE WISEFIELD: new emphasis on songs

Ash's new leaf

pearance in 1975 which, coupled with their exiled situation, can hardly bolster their popularity in their home country. They all seem to accept that absence from the competition scene in England will reduce their following.

"Yeah, I think a lot of people in England are probably talking about us in the past tense," said Upton. "Obviously it can harm a band if you don't work in a country and aren't seen."

"Before we were never seen in America, and now we've changed that situation. After all, people like to go and see the bands and they see the bands they like. They'll see who's playing and it won't be us."

"If we do go back and do a tour and no-one is interested, then we'll be worried, sure. We'd like to do a summer tour there."

Before then, though, Wishbone are set for some extensive touring in the US. Wishbone admit that competition is getting harder in the US, especially for English bands.

"I don't think a lot of them are offering anything musically that's fitting into what the Americans are listening to," said Upton.

"There's a definite type of music that people are getting into over here, and English rock isn't really where it's at at the moment."

"There are bands that happen over here and bands that don't," said Turner. "Slade came over and didn't do well, yet Queen seem to be doing well. But for every one Queen there're 20 other bands trying to do the same thing

whereas before it wasn't like that."

"We listen to American music all the time so it's inevitable that we've become influenced by living over here, but from the word Go, Wishbone have always toured here."

Wishbone's albums in America have sold around 130,000 each, a figure that Upton seems dissatisfied with.

"That's nothing over here," he said. "Nothing compared with what you have to sell to go top ten."

"They seem to have sold over long periods, too, rather than as soon as they were released, and that means you don't get into the charts as there's no rush of sales."

The new album, though, is set apart from the remainder of Wishbone's catalogue by the addition of a keyboard player, Pete Wood, who used to be a member of Sutherland Brothers and Quiver and who is best known for his work on the English session circuit.

"There's even a chance that he may join the band permanently, although this is still being discussed."

"We're hoping that he'll come out on the road with us. We definitely want a keyboard player on the road, and Pete did the album, so he's the obvious choice, but it's a bit premature on both sides to say he's joining the band. But if he can't do it, we'll just get someone else," said Upton.

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